

FITREP 201 (LDO EDITION)

A Compilation of Officer Fitness Report Writing Considerations

Reference (a): BUPERINST 1610.10C, NAVY PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SYSTEM

I. INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of Fitness Reports (FITREPs) is to provide a means of communication from a reporting senior to a Selection Board. **A FITREP is not a counseling tool, and it is important that both the reporting senior brief, and the member being evaluated understand, what his FITREPs are communicating to the board.** This paper provides reporting seniors and their subordinate officers the tools necessary to ensure that their intentions are properly communicated to the selection boards.

The goal of writing a FITREP is to sell your message to a selection board for statutory (rank) and administrative (Drydock CO/Drydock XO/SSBN Weps/Major Command) boards, as well as consideration for slating to high visibility positions (Major Command, Placement Officer, Community Manager, etc.).

Reporting seniors must be careful to manage both the written remarks and the trait averages for each individual in two dimensions, horizontally and vertically. Horizontally is the natural approach, where an individual officer's performance is weighted relative to his competing summary group. Here, the reporting senior must ensure that other officers are not unintentionally disadvantaged while trying to improve a particular officer's record. Vertically, the reporting senior must manage each officer's record over the course of the time that they report on them (as well as countering or overcoming previous record trends that are inconsistent with their observations). The board reviews the officer's record vertically (from oldest to newest) in the Performance Summary Record (PSR). Vertical analysis should show progression and growth in the forced distribution rankings (EP/MP/P), as well as trait averages relative to summary groups and reporting senior cumulative averages, and milestone recommendations earned (e.g. Drydock CO). Inconsistencies, if intended, must be clearly explained in the Block 41 comments, or boards will draw conclusions that might not align with your intentions.

II. MANAGING YOUR REPORTING SENIOR AVERAGE

The Reporting Senior's Average (RSA) shown on an officer's Performance Summary Record (PSR) is the cumulative average on the date of (and

including) the listed reporting group. It is a snapshot in time, which allows you to progress officers above the RSA over time without disadvantaging officers previously rated. You do not have to compare a LT to every other LT you have ever rated on a FITREP.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The RSA includes all officers in that rank that the Reporting Senior has submitted FITREPs on- URL, RL, Active, and Reserve, even if they are in different summary groups.

A. Showing Progress

1. Have a plan for the progression of officers against your RSA. Your plan for an officer that should screen to the next milestone is critical.
2. Successful records at screening and promotion boards show progression/growth (called "breaking right") by rising through the forced distribution over time (P to MP to EP in the same rank under the same reporting senior) and in "breaking right" by improving against the RSA over time.
3. For extraordinary officers, it is OK to start them higher in the progression, but the possible detriment to other officers should be clearly understood before doing so.
4. For officers on the rise, but caught in traffic behind more senior LDOs, Department Heads, etc., it will benefit the P or MP officer if you highlight "EP performance" with an explanation. For example, "Clear EP performance, but behind two more senior LT's," "Equal to my #1 EP in all respects," or "One of my future EPs," sends a positive message to the board. Providing no explanation could have a negative impact.
5. If you have an officer that is not improving or "breaking right" against the RSA over time, and you want that officer to advance, you have to explain the situation in the Block 41 comments, but this can still leave a screening or promotion recommendation to the board's interpretation.

B. Lowering your RSA.

1. Started your RSA too high? If you made a mistake, it is possible to recover.
2. You can reduce it by submitting lower marks for officers leaving the service through separating, transitioning to the reserves, or retiring. DISCUSS WITH THEM FIRST! Never surprise them, and ENSURE the marks are clearly explained in the Block 41 comments,

particularly for an officer who is transitioning to the Reserves.

- a. Example: "CDR XXXXXX is a TRUE 5.0 officer in every sense! Due to his/her transition from the Navy, I am using this FITREP to control (lower) my reporting senior average. This should not be interpreted in any way as a decline in performance!"
3. Another alternative is to lower the marks for all officers in the summary group. AGAIN, MAKE IT CLEAR in Block 41 what you are doing.
 - a. Example: "Disregard the average on this report and for this summary group as I am lowering my reporting senior average. Performance has not declined."

NOTE: YOU SHOULD AVOID ATTEMPTING TO LOWER YOUR RSA ON A 1 OF 1 REPORT SINCE YOU WILL ADVERSELY AFFECT THE OFFICER EVEN IF YOU EXPLAIN THE TRAIT AVERAGE IN THE REMARKS. SOME BOARD MEMBERS MAY VIEW THIS AS ATTEMPTING TO "GAME THE SYSTEM."

C. Other Concerns

1. Some performance traits are more important than others. If an officer is significantly lower in Leadership than Equal Opportunity, as an example, it could send a negative signal to a Board that is wrestling with a tough decision between two officers. Board Members may specifically key on these issues during their brief, especially for officers in command or key leadership positions.
2. If you have two or more officers who are equal in their level of performance, but the "forced distribution" causes you to make one or more officers Promotable (P) or Must Promote (MP), consider making their performance trait average the same, and clearly explaining it in the Block 41 comments. For example, "Ranked MP only due to the forced distribution requirements, but graded equally to my EP."
3. When ranking LT Division Officers or Technical Assistants against Principal Assistants (PA), or LCDR PAs against Department Heads, consider explaining it in the Block 41 comments so that the individual trait average versus that of the summary group is understood. For example, "LT Smith is only below the summary group average on this report due to competing with a seasoned PA" or "LT Smith is only below the summary group average on this report because he has

significantly less time onboard. Performance is equal to my seasoned, EP Principal Assistant!"

III. HARD BREAKOUTS

A. Hard breakouts are defined as the comparing of officers in the same competitive category. Reference (a) forces the distribution of Early Promote (EP), MP and P officers which is the most common type of hard breakout. Ensure you understand the allowed distribution and maximize the use of your EP and MP recommendations.

B. ENS and LTJG Forced Distribution

1. **LDO ENS and LTJG can and should be rated using the entire forced distribution scale.**
2. Specifically, marking an LDO LTJG as Promotable vice Early Promote on a 1 of 1 FITREP is an "Air gap" (discussed in detail in Section V. Detachment FITREPs and "Air gaps" below), and has the same negative impact that it would have on an 1120 LT and above. This "Air gap" will send the board the signal that you do not believe this person should promote or select for the next milestone.

IV. SOFT BREAKOUTS

Soft breakouts compare officers without regard to competitive category. Be consistent in how you apply these, and use as many as are appropriate to frame your officer's performance in the best light. It is highly recommended that you use ALL CAPITALS to make soft breakouts stand out early in the Block 41 comments sections.

A. Breakouts

1. Breaking officers out both in terms of job and overall ranking should be considered if advantageous to the officer.
 - a. Example: "NO. 2 of 17 Principal Assistants IN CVN XX" or "#1 OF 32 LCDRs assigned to NR Field Offices".
2. If no new rankings have been provided since the last report, carry forward the previous ranking. Failing to do so casts doubt as to whether the ranking was lost or simply omitted. This is especially important for detachment of individual (1 of 1) reports - carry the ranking forward if you can legitimately do it.

ALWAYS ensure breakouts across large organizations are coordinated through the main office. This should be a FORMAL process. DO NOT MAKE UP a ranking based on a "passing comment".

V. Detachment FITREPs and "Air gaps"

1. For Detachment of Individual (1 of 1) FITREPs, if you do not make the officer an EP, it will adversely affect their ability to promote; don't do this unless you do not want the officer to screen/promote! This is commonly referred to by Board Members briefing the record as an "Air Gap." We have actually had officers fail to select for promotion because their Reporting Senior writing the FITREP did not understand this, and inadvertently provided a negative connotation to the selection or statutory board. It was not the Reporting Senior's intent that the officer not promote, only that he/she should not be considered for "Below Zone" selection or they did not want to pick one officer over another (i.e. made both officers MP vice making one the EP).
2. At a minimum, carry forward a previous soft breakout if no new rankings have been established.
3. The FITREP will only appear as an "EP Kiss" if the officer is below the RSA; the detaching FITREP should at a minimum put the officer at the RSA (and preferably above the RSA) if you want him/her to continue to promote.

VI. Recommendations (Block 40)

The officer should be recommended for his or her next career milestone provided it is warranted based on his or her performance. Concentrate the recommendations on milestones and future potential.

A. Milestone Recommendations

1. For fleet LDOs common milestones are as follows: CVN PA (RMA, RMO, or SMM if preferred), Drydock XO, Drydock CO, and Major Command Afloat (as appropriate).
2. For NR LDOs common milestones are the following: Large Project Lead, RADCON/JTG/JRG/QA Lead, Assistant NRR, and Deputy NRR. NR LDOs should also be recommended for XO Drydock, CO Drydock, etc. This allows a Board to have some "apples to apples" comparison, but also prevents the Board from possible misinterpretation if an NR LDO has been previously recommended

for CO Drydock, for example, and the Block 40 suddenly changed to Large Project Lead and Assistant NRR. The removal of the CO Drydock recommendation might cause the Officer unintended harm.

3. Keep these recommendations in every FITREP until the officer is serving in the milestone billet.
4. Removing a previous milestone recommendation without discussion of the issue will invite questions and speculation by the board, which tends to work against the officer's record and potential to promote.
5. The Drydock XO board occurs at ~8 years commissioned service (YCS) and Drydock CO board occurs at ~12 YCS.

B. DO NOT leave Block 40 (Recommendations) blank.

1. Leaving blocks blank creates doubt as to the Reporting Senior's intentions.
2. If you do not desire to recommend the officer for his or her next career milestone, put "NONE" in Block 40. Leaving this block blank or putting NONE in the block will disadvantage the officer for promotion. Ensure this is a desired consequence before doing so. See section VII for further discussion of officers in this unique situation.

VII. REMARKS (Block 41)

Be clear in the FITREP and call it like you see it - but carefully consider the officer's suitability for screening to the next milestone, and potential in the next pay grade. You must handle those cases differently, and indiscriminately aiming for only one of the two objectives can have unintended consequences. If the officer is struggling or should NOT be screened to the next milestone, discuss your observations with the ISIC and make sure you have taken action to mentor the officer to improve his or her performance and then annotate the FITREP accordingly. DO NOT LEAVE THE DECISION TO THE BOARD!

A. White space is okay!

1. It helps make important bullets stand out.
2. Excess words mask important performance information that should be briefed to the Selection Board. The easier to read and annotate for the briefer, the better!
3. Future potential is MORE IMPORTANT than fluff about what the officer did. However, substantive comments about significant

achievements tied to future potential is the goal with every block 41 comment/bullet.

B. Soft breakout language is critical.

1. Lead with soft breakouts as explained above.
2. NEVER make the screening/selection board or promotion board member reviewing the record have to search for breakouts!
3. Resist the temptation to 'speed' by conferring additional rankings on officers (i.e. two #1 LTs on board).
4. Don't make up fluffy, misunderstood breakouts, like "#1 of 3 YG 96 officers not already screened for Drydock Command."

C. Be Consistent!

1. Block 41 comments should be consistent with the recommendation(s) in Block 40 and any soft breakouts.

D. Be Positive!

1. Unless you are trying to prevent the officer from being BOTH promoted and screened to the next milestone, the words should be positive.
2. Negative words in Block 41 will likely preclude promotion as well as screening, even if directed only to prevent screening at an Administrative Board and allow selection at a Statutory Board. Remember that many of today's statutory boards are looking for a reason to say "no," especially at the O4 level.

E. Unit Awards

1. If the ship received a major award (Battenberg Cup, Omaha Trophy, Arleigh Burke Fleet Trophy Award, Battle "E" or Department awards), ENSURE the officer's contribution to earning the award is highlighted. If not, the officer was only there!

F. Personal Awards

1. If the officer has earned awards or accolades that are prestigious or atypical for officers of their rank or experience, document these. Examples include the Engineer of the Year, Watch Officer of the Year, and other Navy League, Submarine League, or professional society awards such as Hispanic Engineer or Black Engineer awards. Other examples include a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (NCM) for a Division Officer, Meritorious Service Medal (MSM) for a

Department Head or XO, and Legion of Merit (LOM) for a CDR CHENG.

G. Exemplary performance in the toughest duties.

1. Don't assume the board will give the officer credit for being assigned one of the hard jobs. If you make your go-to officer the DCA or QAO, give him/her credit for this in Block 41.

H. Screening status is IMPORTANT!

1. If the officer screened for a career milestone since the last FITREP, include it! Example: "SCREENED FOR DRYDOCK XO/CO!" Use this exact language whether the officer screens for Drydock XO/CO Alternate or for Drydock XO/CO. This screening status does not show up on the PSR for Statutory Boards. Therefore, the career milestone achieved must be documented in a FITREP remark at least once after screening to not disadvantage the officer for promotion.

I. Ship-wide Impact

1. For PAs/DHs and Division Officers, ship-wide impact can be a discriminator for officers that are not breakout performers. If your go-to officer is making a difference outside his or her lane, ensure this is documented.

J. Rankings from new reporting seniors.

1. If you are the new reporting senior and the officer's ranking (different from RSA - as this will change from one reporting senior to the next) is not the same as the previous reporting senior or declines, IT MUST BE EXPLAINED IN THE REMARKS. Otherwise you cast doubt on the officer's record or to your intentions. "Ranked #2 of 16 LCDRs onboard. This change in ranking from #1 represents my evaluation as his new reporting senior. LT Smith's performance has not declined- he continues to excel and has my strongest possible recommendation for immediate promotion to O4 and selection for Drydock CO."

K. LDO Considerations

1. If you have questions pertaining to writing an LDO FITREP, find a senior LDO (or call one of the LDO Detailers on staff at PERS-42) to discuss the key tenets in an LDO's career path and pedigree. They are different than those for 1120s and 1110s, and not highlighting what the LDO community values may inadvertently hurt their promotion chances.

NOTE: LDO ENS and LTJG do not have to be marked Promotable (P) or lower like URL ENS and LTJG. Marking your LDO as a P is an "Air gap" and will likely cause them not to select for follow-on milestones or promotion.

VIII. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Leadership has noted that record management can typically be binned into three categories, reflecting the individual's level of concern for screening/promotions:

- Those who deliberately seek to be overlooked for selection, by requesting to not be considered. This is a very small group of officers and is typically encountered at more senior levels.
- A group of officers who may appear indifferent, and let their record tell the story with little management. This approach can yield good or bad results, and risks the best qualified officers not selecting due to poorly maintained records.
- A group of officers who pull out all the stops and meticulously manage their record to paint a picture of attentiveness, attention to detail, and desire to succeed in our community.

Identifying these groups early will help focus your counseling efforts and effectively communicating your officer's potential to the board.

A. Boardsmanship.

1. As the primary career counselor for officers you report on, you owe those officers advice on how their record will appear and what they can do to improve their record.
2. It is well worth the time to get the record permanently corrected, but if errors are discovered just prior to a board, they can be addressed via a letter to the Board President. Letters to administrative or statutory selection boards do not result in a permanent correction to an Officer's record. Permanent correction to individual records should be made via the procedures specified at:

<http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/career/recordsmanagement/militarypersonnelrecords/Pages/DoCorrect.aspx>

3. Only three things are seen by every board member: the official photo, Officer Summary Record (OSR) and Performance Summary Record (PSR). An officer can show that he or she cares about promotion and screening by ensuring these are accurate.
4. Ask someone who has been to a board to look at the officer's record if you have questions on how to properly counsel an officer and set reasonable expectations, or call one of the LDO Detailers on staff at PERS-42.

B. Official Photo.

1. A new official photo (full length Service Khaki) is required within 90 days of promotion. Old photos can have a magnified negative impact, especially if there are PFA failures annotated in the officer's record. The photo can influence the board.
2. Try hard to get a professional Navy photo completed at a Public Affairs Office in Service Khaki. If you must take the photo yourself, follow the rules for the photos: find the most neutral backdrop possible, turn on as many lights as possible, and ensure the result that is sent in is not blurry or dark.
3. Consider a new photo if there is a significant positive appearance change such as significant weight loss (especially after a PFA failure).

C. Typical PSR and OSR errors.

1. Missing FITREPS.
 - a. Strive for day to day continuity in your FITREPS. Reference (a) describes the process for correcting administrative errors.
2. FITREP cycle ends shortly before the board convenes.
 - a. Ensure this FITREP arrives in time to the board by writing a letter to the board and engaging PERS 42 to make sure that the report is entered into the board records, even if the FITREP has not yet arrived to PERS for official record entry. The process can be expedited through email following the guidance on the NPC website (<http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/Pages/default.aspx>).

As a reporting senior, get FITREPS in these categories done early. The tightest timeline for statutory boards is between the deadline for LT FITREP submission and the convening of the O4 board (typically held in April). The tightest timeline for administrative boards is between the deadline for LCDR FITREP submission and the convening of the CO Drydock board (typically held in November).

3. The OSR frequently does not show all of an officer's awards. Every element of potential breakout matters and the absence of an end of tour award, or a special award that is not in the record (e.g. Bronze Star earned while on IA) can impact an officer's selection opportunity.

D. Advanced Education.

1. While LDOs are not required to have a degree, the Navy values advanced education. If you have earned a Bachelor's Degree, Master's degree or PhD, ensure it is properly documented in your record. This degree can be a discriminator.

*Note: A degree earned by an LDO when Enlisted will not transfer automatically to the OSR. The Officer must take action to make the transfer complete. Have the Officer call their Detailer on how to do this.

E. Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA).

1. Today's Navy culture tends to find a lack of fitness and sharp appearance unsatisfactory. Failed or undocumented PFAs may prevent an officer from selecting for promotion. Remember that statutory boards are looking for a reason to say "no" and failed or undocumented PFAs can and have been a discriminator for promotion.

F. Letters to the Board.

1. Officers have to endorse any information provided to a board for which they are being considered, no matter how positive it is.
2. Officers should write to the board to clear up any questions. A letter to the President of the Board is required to be briefed before board members can cast their vote.
3. As a Reporting Senior, you can set the record straight in a letter of recommendation if a revised FITREP is not feasible.

This might be appropriate for an officer who did not get a detaching Kiss FITREP due to your error, an unintentional Air Gap or downward trend in trait average, or inconsistent or overly restrictive grading in early FITREPS during your tour.

IX. OTHER THOUGHTS

A. Extension Letters

1. Reference (a) allows a Reporting Senior to Extend a FITREP for up to 3 months in lieu of a Detachment of Individual, Detachment of Reporting Senior, or a Frocking report.
2. Unless the period is less than about two to four weeks, ALWAYS WRITE A PERIODIC OR DETACHING FITREP. We use Extension Letters all too frequently and it sends the signal that either we don't care or did not take the time to write a FITREP (i.e. less ADMIN for us).
3. Writing FITREPs at every opportunity gives an officer a chance to be an "EP," an increased performance trait average as compared to the RSA, and potentially a better soft breakout.

B. Special FITREPs.

1. Reference (a) authorizes submission of a special FITREP by a new Reporting Senior who has not written an "Observed" report on an officer that is eligible for a Statutory Promotion Board, if the officer has performed significant duties for that Reporting Senior for at least 3 months. This is important to ensure all relevant information regarding the officer's performance is provided to the Board.
2. Don't bother doing special FITREPs for officers on their BELOW ZONE looks.

NOTE: Special FITREPs are not authorized for other than Statutory Boards, so they are not an option for Administrative Boards such as Drydock CO/XO or Major Command Screening. However, a Special FITREP can be submitted once satisfactory physical readiness is achieved on the most recent command Physical Fitness Assessment regardless of upcoming boards.